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THE GENUINE PRINCIPLES OF ALL RELIGIOUS DISSENT, AND ESPECIALLY OF *The Protestant Dissenters in England*, ILLUSTRATED AND DEFENDED:

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED ON

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1792,

TO THE

Congregation of Protestant Dissenters,

IN

HEMEL-HEMPSTEAD.

BY JOHN LIDDON.

Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?

LONDON:

SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD; C. DILLY, POULTRY;
T. KNOTT, LOMBARD-STREET; M. GURNEY, HOLBORN;
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M. DCC. XCIII.

BRITISH MUSEUM

PREFACE.

NOTHING is more common, and at the ſame time more to be lamented, than the general undue attention which Chriſtians of all denominations pay to the peculiarities of their own party, while they too often neglect or pay a very ſuperficial attention to the grand ends for which Jeſus Chriſt lived and died; in compariſon of which the peculiarities of any party are nothing.

If any principles or mode of worſhip be ſuperior to the reſt, it is becauſe they operate more powerfully in producing thoſe heavenly fruits, which are the natural offſpring of *the grace of God, which bringeth ſalvation.* In other things, Chriſtians, having an equal right to follow their convictions, ſhould agree to differ; but in promoting the fruits of righteouſneſs, they ſhould be *of one heart, and of one mind.*

Now no denomination can follow their own convictions, without admitting the principles defended in the following diſcourſe; and therefore it is of the utmoſt conſequence that the nature and importance of thoſe principles ſhould be generally known. They are the fundamental principles on which Chriſtianity was firſt introduced into the world—the common principles of Proteſtant Diſſenters

of all denominations—and, it may be added too, the only principles on which the Church of England can juſtify its ſeparation from the Church of Rome.

I notice this more particularly, becauſe it is now too common with ſome of the Members of the Eſtabliſhed Church, to ſpeak of the Diſſenters as if there were ſomething in *their* principles of diſſent hoſtile to the peace of ſociety, and in which all Proteſtants do not agree; but this is not the caſe. The reaſons which intelligent Churchmen give for their ſeparation from the Church of Rome, are the very reaſons which Diſſenters give for their ſeparation from the Eſtabliſhed Church.

Theſe important principles have been ſo much neglected by the Diſſenters themſelves, that thouſands among them are ignorant of the juſt grounds of their diſſent. It cannot then be deemed ſtrange that others ſhould not be acquainted with theſe grounds, and that they ſhould therefore lie open to the inſinuations of thoſe who make no conſcience of what they ſay, whoſe only aim is, by their miſrepreſentations, to cruſh the objects of their diſlike. There is not a more dangerous enemy than ignorance.

Such, as Proteſtants, ſhould remember that the general principles of the Diſſenters are theirs; and that they cannot juſtly reproach the Diſſenters on this account, without renouncing their Proteſtant principles, and

and returning again to the boſom of the Church of Rome; for there is no medium between the principles of liberty of conſcience contended for by the Diſſenters, and ſubmiſſion to the authority of Rome. Of this the Catholics are well aware, and have always ſucceſsfully puſhed this argument, when they have had to contend with perſons who went on any other grounds than thoſe eſtabliſhed in the enſuing diſcourſe. This was formerly done in the diſpute between Boſſuet, the Catholic Biſhop, and the famous reformer, John Claude. The Biſhop was victorious. It could not be otherwiſe.

On the *political* principles of the Diſſenters it is neither the buſineſs nor the inclination of the author at preſent to ſay any thing; nor is it neceſſary. The *hiſtory* of the Diſſenters will be their beſt defence; they took a decided part in the glorious Revolution, and have ever nobly ſupported the preſent government, when it has been attacked by its foes; and it is not too much to affirm, that were the government again to be in the ſame danger as in 1745 (which God forbid) they would again be found among its firſt and moſt zealous defenders.

But if after all that can be advanced from reaſon, hiſtory, and ſcripture, the Diſſenters muſt be reproached, merely becauſe they *are* Diſſenters, and ſtudy to *render unto God the things that are God's*, they have no occaſion to be aſhamed. *They are encompaſſed with*

with a great cloud of witneſſes, and are countenanced in their principles and practice by all the friends of truth and righteouſneſs, from Abraham to the preſent day. At the head of theſe ſtands Jeſus Chriſt, *who endured the contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, and who left his followers an example that they ſhould tread in his ſteps; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.*

A full conviction of the truth and importance of the principles maintained in this plain Sermon, together with a deſire to do away prejudice and calumny, occaſions its publication. If the matter be good and true, it *requires* no apology; if it be not, it *deſerves* none. Such as it is, the writer commends it to the candour of the public, and the bleſſing of God.

Hemel-Hempſtead,
March 1, 1793.

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THE

PRINCIPLES OF DISSENT

FROM THE

ESTABLISHED CHURCH,

STATED AND DEFENDED.

Then Agrippa ſaid unto Paul, Thou art permitted to ſpeak for thyſelf. Then Paul ſtretched forth his hand, and anſwered for himſelf: I think myſelf happy, king Agrippa, becauſe I ſhall anſwer for myſelf this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accuſed of the Jews.

ACTS XXVI. 1, 2.

PREJUDICE, calumny, and clamour, are the greateſt enemies to the propagation of truth in the world. Prejudice ſeizes every avenue to the mind, and ſo prevents its entrance. *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* was the cry in ancient times.—Calumny blackens the characters of the advocates of truth, and repreſents them as the worſt of mankind. *He hath a devil and is mad, why hear ye him? He ſtirreth up the people. If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæſar's friend.*

Thus

Thus ſaid calumny when *the brightneſs of his Father's glory*, Jeſus Chriſt, preached the glad tidings of ſalvation to a world lying in ignorance and wickedneſs.—Clamour prevents the advocates of truth from making any defence, and cries out, *Crucify him! Crucify him!* or, *Great is Diana of the Epheſians.* This was the conduct of the enemies of truth, when chriſtianity was firſt taught in the world; and, as theſe arms have been but too ſucceſsful in every age, and no better for the purpoſe can be found, they are ſtill in uſe.

Perhaps their unhappy effects have never more ſtrikingly appeared than in the preſent day; as they reſpect that well known and numerous body of men, the Proteſtant Diſſenters, whoſe conduct at the glorious Revolution and in all the attempts which ſince have been made by others to overturn it, has proved them to be among its beſt friends; and whoſe attachment to the family which that Revolution placed upon the throne, has never been exceeded, if equalled, by any deſcription of men in this hitherto highly favoured land.

It has been their conſtant cuſtom to commemorate at this ſeaſon of the year, the glorious Revolution in 1688, as the moſt ſignal favour which Heaven has beſtowed on Great Britain; and to teach their children veneration for the conſtitution of their country, and gratitude to the Father of all mercies for the inеſtimable bleſſing!

Nothing

Nothing appears more ſurpriſing than that the principles of the Diſſenters ſhould be ſo little known, and ſo much miſrepreſented, as to make it neceſſary now to ſtate and defend them. This is my intention to day. What Agrippa ſaid to Paul, the laws of England ſay to every Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſter; *Thou art permitted to ſpeak for thyſelf.* Every Proteſtant Diſſenting Miniſter likewiſe, who is attached to the cauſe of Diſſent, will be thankful for an opportunity to reply to all the miſrepreſentations reſpecting his connections, in the words of Paul to Agrippa; *I think myſelf happy, becauſe I ſhall anſwer for myſelf.*

Not only their political ſentiments are unknown or miſrepreſented by many, but even their principles of religious diſſent are comparatively but little underſtood. Secure in the enjoyment of their religious liberties, their teachers have neglected to inculcate the principles of their diſſent, though they are the very principles on which Chriſtianity firſt was promulgated, and on which every proteſtant church in the world, the church eſtabliſhed by law in our native country not excepted, muſt ſtand. For, if the principles of proteſtant diſſent be not agreeable to the principles of eternal juſtice, reaſon, and Scripture, on what ground will the eſtabliſhed church juſtify its diſſent from the church of Rome? The principles on which the church of England reformed, are the principles on which the Proteſtant

Diſſenters reſt; and the arguments of the eſtabliſhed church, which juſtify its diſſent from popery, juſtify us in our ſeparation from the eſtabliſhed church. Both reſt upon the ſame firm and immovable rock. If the members of the church of England ſay their ſeparation is founded on Scripture, the Diſſenters may reply—Ours too is juſtified by Scripture, and ſanctioned by your own example. In this we are imitators of you.

Before I enter into the ſtatement and defence propoſed, it will be proper to make ſome obſervations on thoſe circumſtances which are often confounded with our diſſent, but which, ſtrictly ſpeaking, have nothing to do with it. It is ſuppoſed that our diſſent is grounded on our *diſlike* to the *miniſters* and *doctrines* of the eſtabliſhed church; but a little attention to the ſubject will remove this miſtake.

Among ſuch a numerous body as the clergy of the eſtabliſhed church, there are, as among all great bodies of men, perſons of various deſcriptions. There are ſome who, doubtleſs, do no honour to their community, and who put their virtuous and pious brethern to the bluſh. It would argue an equal degree of ignorance and illiberality to impute their faults to any but to themſelves. There are in every large ſociety thoſe who are rather a diſgrace than a credit to it. On the other hand, it is but juſtice to ſay, that there are many in the church,

church, whoſe abilities and virtues are an ornament to human nature; and who are engaged in the glorious cauſe of weakening the kingdom of ignorance, falſehood, and vice, and of extending the kingdom of light, truth, and holineſs, which is the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt: for ſuch we cannot feel any diſlike. We deſire to cultivate with them the moſt perfect friendſhip. They have our beſt wiſhes; and we ſay, in the language of the apoſtle, *grace, mercy, and peace, be multiplied unto them! They* are the Iſrael of God. Our diſſent is ſo far from being founded on a diſlike to them, that, on the contrary, we feel for them the moſt cordial eſteem.

Nor is our common diſſent (for I am not defending now any particular party of Diſſenters) founded on a diſapprobation of the *doctrines* of the eſtabliſhment, which, whether right or wrong it is not my buſineſs to affirm, are moſt unqueſtionably Calviniſtic and Trinitarian. Were diſſent or conformity to depend on belief or diſbelief of the doctrines of the church, I believe there is no riſque in ſaying, that by far the greater part of the Diſſenters would be conſcientious and zealous conformiſts; yea, much more ſo than a great number of the clergy themſelves. This is a fact ſo notorious, that an attempt to make it more plain would be an unneceſſary loſs of time. We do not then, as a body, diſſent from the doc-

trines of the church. Our diſſent is, *a diſſent from its conſtitution* and *government.*

Without entering minutely into every article which ſeems now to court our attention, I ſhall content myſelf with ſtating and defending the four following general principles, in which all Diſſenters alike are intereſted.—Firſt, We think that the Chriſtian religion is nothing but religion: for *Chriſt's kingdom is not of this world.*—Secondly, We acknowledge no other head of the church than Jeſus Chriſt; *one is your maſter, even Chriſt, and all ye are brethren.*—Thirdly, We believe that the Scriptures alone, without the addition of human articles or creeds, are ſufficient to determine all matters of faith and practice: *Chriſt is the author and finiſher of our faith.*—And, Fourthly, We believe that, as *every one muſt give an account of himſelf to God*, every individual ought to be left to follow the dictates of his own mind, without any human incentive or reſtraint. Theſe, I may venture to affirm, are the common principles of proteſtant diſſent. We maintain then, the ſpirituality of the Chriſtian religion—the ſole dominion of Chriſt—the ſufficiency of Scripture—and the right of private judgment. Principles are theſe which at once *bring glory to God, and happineſs to mankind.* They cannot be violated without bringing the Chriſtian religion into circumſtances of ſuſpicion, and introducing miſery into the religious world.

I. The

I.

The firſt principle of proteſtant diſſent is this: *The chriſtian religion is nothing but religion.*

The kingdom of Chriſt is not of this world. This is his own definition given before Pilate, John xviii. 36. It is different from the kingdoms of this world in its origin, objects, and end. The kingdoms of this world are of human origin; the objects of civil government are the protection of the perſons, property, and reputation of all deſcriptions of men; and its end is, to ſecure the greateſt degree of happineſs in the preſent ſtate, but beyond this ſtate the powers of civil government cannot reach. Now the religion of Jeſus *is not of this world.* Its origin is from Heaven; its objects are to regulate the paſſions, to inform the mind, and to lead chriſtians from one degree of moral improvement to another, till its *end* be accompliſhed in their *meetneſs for an inheritance with the ſaints in light.*

Thus religion is diſtinct from civil government, and yet by no means hoſtile to it: For, though it do not acknowledge the power of the civil magiſtrate over the conſciences of men, it teaches reſpect for his authority in *civil* affairs. By thus diſtinguiſhing between civil and ſacred things, it obeys the injunction of its glorious Author, "*Render unto Cæſar the things which are Cæſar's*; "*and unto God, the things which are God's.*"

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On any other principle than this, the religion of Jeſus Chriſt could never have been introduced into the world; for, where is the civil government to be found whoſe religion was not different from that which Jeſus taught? Yea, our Lord and his followers continued to teach it, not only without the conſent of, but in direct oppoſition to, the chief prieſts and rulers; and they loſt their lives on that account. Admit, therefore, that the civil magiſtrate has a right to interfere in matters purely religious, and the ſufferings and death of Chriſt and of his followers were not acts of perſecution, cruelty, and murder; but were acts of juſtice and neceſſity. On this principle, Chriſtians cannot be juſtified in profeſſing Chriſtianity in any form where it is not the religion of the ſtate. Admit this, and religion is no longer a matter of conviction and conſcience; and the Chriſtian muſt change his ideas and manner of worſhip, as he does his dreſs, in order to accommodate himſelf to the manners and cuſtoms of the country where he reſides. But who is not ſhocked at ſuch propoſitions. And would not the admiſſion of them be the deſtruction of all religion and principle? Is life itſelf worth preſerving, where conſcience is not free?

Beſides, the Chriſtian religion is like its glorious Author; *it is no reſpecter of perſons.* It ſpeaks alike both to the high and low, the governors and the governed. And ſuch language is every way worthy

worthy the majeſty of God, *before whom all the inhabitants of the earth are as graſshoppers.* Of magiſtrates and ſubjects, of the higheſt potentate and the meaneſt peaſant, it alike requires the ſacrifice of the ſame paſſions, the ſame faith, the ſame diſpoſitions, and the ſame qualifications of every kind, before they can enjoy the privileges of the Chriſtian church. *Out* of the church, there is a wide difference between the magiſtrate and the peaſant: and for the people to reſpect the magiſtrate, is to reſpect themſelves; for it is their power with which he is entruſted, and he is to uſe it for their good. The *conſequence* of each riſes and falls together. But *in* the church, every diſtinction of a worldly kind is loſt; and he is in the ſight of God the moſt acceptable worſhipper, who offers by Jeſus Chriſt the moſt ſpiritual ſacrifices.

This reaſoning will admit of further illuſtration, if we attentively conſider, that all the promiſes of religion are made, not to rank in life, but to moral character. The promiſes of pardon are confined in Scripture to the penitent. If the meaneſt perſon in the hoſpital, or workhouſe, be a penitent, the promiſes of pardoning mercy are his; but if the monarch of the univerſe, ſurrounded with more than the outward glory of Solomon, were an impenitent, he would be excluded from all the conſolations of pardoning grace. Neither his power or ſplendor would be of any uſe to him

him in the ſight of that God *who is the judge of hearts.*

The ſame reaſoning will hold good with reſpect to every other part of the Chriſtian character. It is not rank, but moral qualities, which fit a man for the enjoyments of pure religion. Let any man who has a doubt of the truth of theſe aſſertions, read the beatitudes, in the fifth of Matthew, and he will then clearly ſee, that they are the *penitent*, the *pure in heart*, the *meek*, and ſo on, to whom the bleſſings belong.

But further ſtill, ſuppoſe the magiſtrate be a Chriſtian. His character as a Chriſtian will, and ought to give him weight in proportion to its excellence; but he is not hence to ſuppoſe that he has a right to enact laws in the church. The religion of Jeſus is perfect. *He is author, and* FINISHER *of the Chriſtian faith;* and no authority is to be ſet up there in oppoſition to that of our common *Lord.* The Chriſtian and the magiſtrate muſt be kept diſtinct. *Out* of the church, it is the duty of the Chriſtian to pay the magiſtrate every token of proper reſpect; but *in* the church, there is no ſovereign but Jeſus Chriſt. *His kingdom is not of this world.* But though it be *not of this world*, yet it is friendly to the beſt intereſts of mankind. If the kingdom of Chriſt be ſet up in the heart of a man, it will produce all the virtues belonging to his ſituation. In the tradeſman, integrity and punctuality; in the magiſtrate, the

maintenance

maintenance of order and juſtice; in the ſtateſman, a conſtant attention to the public good. But it ſhould ever be remembered that *the Chriſtian religion is nothing but religion.* This is one principle of proteſtant diſſent.

II.

The ſecond principle of proteſtant diſſent is, that *we acknowledge no ſovereign over conſcience but Jeſus Chriſt.*

In the preſent prevailing diſpoſition to miſrepreſent the Diſſenters, it may be neceſſary to obſerve, that we confine the propoſition entirely to matters of *conſcience.* In every other view, we wiſh to give proof of equal attachment to civil government with any deſcription of men whatever; otherwiſe we ſhould have no juſt claim to expect equal protection and equal privileges. But if once we admit any one to interfere in matters of conſcience, and to dictate as a maſter, Chriſt is no longer on the throne; the equality of his diſciples, who are conſidered as *brethren,* is deſtroyed, and confuſion neceſſarily enſues.

It is a matter of little conſequence to Chriſtians, who is the perſon, or what are the pretenſions of thoſe who aſſume this authority over conſcience. To them the conſequences are juſt the ſame, the loſs of freedom of determination and action; and this once loſt, all that is eſſential to Chriſtian action

is gone. For what can be the value of any religious action which does not proceed from the mind and heart? Of all the different perſons who lay claim to dominion over conſcience, his Holineſs at Rome is the moſt conſiſtent; he is a ſpiritual perſon, affirms himſelf to be the ſucceſſor of Peter, and that he is infallible in his judgment. Could he make out theſe claims, it would not follow that he had a right to exact obedience without conviction; for the better his claims were founded, the more they would challenge examination, and examination would be the only way to eſtabliſh them. This method God has taken in every age; he calls men to reaſon with him, and exhorts them to conſider.

This is the method the great ſovereign of the church purſued; he did not enforce in his teaching implicit faith, but he called upon men to *ſearch the Scriptures*, in order that their *faith might not ſtand in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of the truth of God.* He wants no blind diſciples. Hence he aſks, *Have ye underſtood all theſe things? How is it that ye do not yet underſtand?* And again, when he deſcribes the characters of thoſe who received the ſeed in good ground, *they hear the word and* UNDERSTAND *it.* If Jeſus Chriſt do not require implicit faith, if he ſubmit his doctrine to the unbiaſſed underſtandings and conſciences of men, by what authority can fallible men of any deſcription, require more than the maſter

maſter has, and that in direct oppoſition to his command, who has forbidden every aſſumption of authority in his church, and has informed his diſciples that they are brethren? If men approve of an Hierarchy, or an Eſpiſcopal Government, by all means let them enjoy it; but let them at the ſame time neither perſecute nor miſrepreſent thoſe who plead for what they think the purity of religion and the ſole dominion of Jeſus Chriſt in the Chriſtian church: For theſe conſider it equally binding on them, neither to claim dominion themſelves over the conſciences of others, nor to acknowledge the claim of other men where it is made. Should it be objected, that ſome Diſſenters act a tyrannical part, and aſſume dominion themſelves; the anſwer is, they act inconſiſtently with the character they ſuſtain, and ſtand condemned by their own profeſſed principles, a circumſtance not uncommon in other caſes in this ſtate of imperfection.

We may add too, that the acknowledgment of the ſole dominion of Chriſt, is the moſt peaceable of all principles; for where it is acknowledged, perſecution cannot ſubſiſt. But introduce any other authority, and you introduce confuſion; for the ſtrife about power immediately commences; and where there is a ſtrife for power, *there is confuſion and every evil work.* The admiſſion of human authority has corrupted Chriſtianity, ſown the ſeeds of perpetual diſcord, and

too, too often overwhelmed the church with miſery: nor will the church ever recover its primitive purity and peace, till all human interference in matters of religion is done away; for the Lord of conſcience is the only judge of conſcience. He alone knows the nature and ſources of men's miſtakes, and what degree of guilt or innocence attaches to each. He too alone knows the time and meaſure of their puniſhment, where they become important, and when they ariſe from depravity of heart. The offence is againſt him. But even in the worſt caſes no human authority has a right to puniſh. Every pretence of perſecution is thus taken away; and by maintaining the ſole dominion of Chriſt in the Chriſtian church, peace is preſerved. This is another principle of proteſtant diſſent, a principle which all in a ſtate of perſecution will allow. Unhappily all parties have in their turns been perſecuted; but I believe there never was a ſingle inſtance in which the perſecuted did not think then, that perſecution is unjuſt.

III.

The third principle of proteſtant diſſent is, that *the ſcriptures are of themſelves ſufficient to determine all articles of faith and practice, without the authority of the church, or the addition of human articles or creeds.*

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The hiſtory of the introduction, and of the ſupport of *human creeds*, is, in too many inſtances, the hiſtory of human ignorance and depravity working under the maſk of zeal for the glory of God and the purity of Goſpel truth. But theſe pretences will not bear the light in any view; there is no view we can take of them in which they do not fail, and defeat the end propoſed. Let us for a few moments examine the utility of creeds——what kind of perſons they ought to be who draw them up——the pretences for which they were made——and the general effects they produce.

1. Let us examine the *utility* of creeds. Where much is riſqued, there ought to be ſome powerful reaſons to juſtify the venture; for the peace of the church of Chriſt ought not to be diſturbed by things of trifling or no importance. Let us ſuppoſe three ſorts of creeds, which will include all that have ever been publiſhed; they may be conſidered as containing more, or leſs, or exactly the ſame ideas as the Scripture preſents us with. In the firſt caſe, the creed would be ſuperfluous, and all the ideas which are unſcriptural would perplex the ſubject, and ought by all means to be diſcarded. It would be officious, human folly and raſhneſs attempting to improve divine wiſdom. In the ſecond caſe, if the creed contained a leſs number of ideas on any given ſubject, than the Goſpel affords, it would then be deficient, and

ought,

ought, on the account of its perfection, not to be introduced. But ſuppoſe the third caſe, which can only be a ſuppoſition; for it may be fairly preſumed it was never yet a fact, that the creed contained the whole number of ideas which the Goſpel contained on the ſubjects included, and that each idea was placed in the moſt proper, forcible and ſtriking point of view—ſtill it will be uſeleſs, becauſe its perfection would conſiſt in its exact reſemblance to the ſcriptures. And why not ſuffer the ſcriptures to ſpeak for themſelves on the ſubject, and thus let divine wiſdom have the ſuperior honour which it deſerves? Much evil may, and has been introduced into the Chriſtian church by the introduction of human creeds; but I believe it may be ſafely affirmed, that no one benefit has been derived from them, from the day they were firſt introduced to the preſent moment. Proteſtant Diſſenters reject them on the account of their inutility, and the bad conſequences that neceſſarily follow.

2. Attend for a moment to the *perſons* who draw up the creeds which other people are to ſubſcribe and believe. I will not for a moment ſuppoſe them to be bad men, or to be under improper influence; I will only conſider the ſubject as it relates *to the mental ability* of the compilers. And here in every view the pretences will be found to fail.

Let us ſuppoſe firſt, the perſons who are to compoſe

compoſe the creed to be *wiſe men*; their creed will be abundantly too rich for the capacity of the weak, but pious Chriſtian. And ought any man, for the ſake of conformity, to be obliged to ſay that he believes an article about which he has never thought, or which, if he had, he could not underſtand? Truth ought never to be ſacrificed to uniformity of profeſſion, which can only tend to bring religion into ſuſpicion.

If we ſuppoſe the compilers to be of the *middle claſs*, in point of ability, it will be found that their views will fall ſhort of thoſe who have a greater degree of mental penetration; and will alſo go beyond the obſervation of perſons who poſſeſs an inferior degree of capacity, but of whoſe piety there can be no queſtion.

But if, for the ſake of the pious though weak Chriſtian, we put the buſineſs of making articles of communion into the hands of men of *inferior capacity*, who does not ſee that the minds of thoſe who are more enlarged in their views, will be revolted at the diſcovery of weakneſs and abſurdity; and will therefore in diſguſt withhold their aſſent?

The truth ſeems to be this, the author of our religion has obſerved a variety in revelation, as well as in all his other works; and to attempt to deſtroy this order which he has eſtabliſhed, by ſubſtituting a dull uniformity, is an attack upon the order of nature, providence and religion.

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The object never was, nor ever will be obtained; and every attempt has only ſhewn it to be impoſſible. For one proof of this we may advert to our national eſtabliſhment. The object propoſed by ſubſcription to the ſame articles and creeds, is uniformity. It is true, there is an uniformity in the matter of *ſubſcription*; but it is as true that there is a vaſt *variety* in the doctrines believed and taught by the miniſters of this ſame church; for, in the ſame eſtabliſhment, different pulpits ſpeak a very different language; and there are to be found Calviniſts and Arminians, Trinitarians and Antitrinitarians, and alſo the admirers of a Prieſtley and a Swedenborg. A plain proof that uniformity of belief, even in the eſtabliſhment, is but a *name*.

3. If we further conſider the *pretences* themſelves which are uſed, neither will theſe bear a fair inveſtigation. The moſt plauſible and the moſt important is, to preſerve ſoundneſs in the faith. But if articles or creeds be ſound, it is becauſe they correſpond with the ſcriptures of truth. Now whether we conſider ſoundneſs in the faith as it reſpects the head, the heart, or the life, the only way is to make Scripture the teſt. That Chriſtian whoſe ideas moſt clearly and univerſally correſpond with the Goſpel of Jeſus Chriſt, is certainly the moſt orthodox in his *judgment*. He who loves its various truths moſt, becauſe of their holy tendency, is undoubtedly the

the moſt orthodox in his *heart.* And it may be as ſafely added, that the Chriſtian who is the moſt uniform in his obedience to all that the Goſpel injoins, is the moſt orthodox in his *life.* But how is this kind of orthodoxy to be produced? Is it not beſt done by keeping the ſource of religion pure, and referring men, not to the articles of a creed confeſſedly of human invention, but to the oracles of eternal truth. For, ſuppoſing that thoſe articles and creeds be right, the framing them is certainly doubling a man's trouble; he muſt firſt compare his belief and practice with his articles and creeds, and then examine theſe by the Scripture to know if they are right. And as men are naturally averſe to thinking and examination, it is certainly not very prudent unneceſſarily to encreaſe their labour. Such a conduct is not removing ſtumbling blocks, put putting them in a Chriſtian's way. The pretences then likewiſe fail.

4. The *effects* of creeds and articles come next in place; but theſe will more fully appear under the fourth and laſt principle of Proteſtant Diſſent.

IV.

The fourth principle of Proteſtant Diſſent is, that *every man has an undoubted right to judge for himſelf in all matters which relate to his ſalvation.* This ariſes from his accountability; for it follows of conſequence, that if every man muſt

give an account of himſelf to God, his conſcience ought not to be under any foreign controul. It would be the height of injuſtice to make a man accountable for his conduct, and at the ſame time not to let him be made maſter of his own actions. And if God, to whom he is accountable, leave him free, what power on earth has a right to direct his conſcience? Yet this is always done where there is a religion impoſed.

It is for the ſake of impoſition, that religion is mixed with ſecular things, that human authority is introduced, that articles and creeds are framed; for take away impoſition, and the other articles are of no value. Here then is the principal ground of our diſſent. To a man who enters into that *liberty wherewith Chriſt has made his followers free*, the queſtion is not, whether what is attempted to be impoſed be right or wrong; but what *right* has any man, or ſet or men, to dictate in a matter which lies between a man and his Maker? Were the articles propoſed agreeable to his own ſentiments, and expreſſed in the moſt unexceptionable way, it would be the duty of the Chriſtian to diſavow the authority and refuſe to ſubſcribe. *One is your maſter, even Chriſt.*

But, after all, if religion be a matter of conviction and choice, it cannot be impoſed; for what human authority can force conviction on the underſtanding and fix the heart? If human authority cannot do *this*, it cannot do any good.

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It is entirely uſeleſs, yea injurious. And if the underſtanding be informed, and the heart attached, impoſition comes too late. Religion ſits enthroned on the heart, and all the powers of the world cannot add to its ſtability.

But if impoſition cannot do any good, it is as clear that it may, it can, and has done a great deal of harm. Its effects are as dreadful as they are undeniable. If one denomination of Chriſtians think they have a right to impoſe their faith upon the reſt, the direct tendency of their attempting to exerciſe this ſuppoſed right, when they meet with any who refuſe to acknowledge their authority, is, to alienate the affections of both parties; and to make that religion the means of ſeparation, which is deſigned to unite all the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt together, and to make of them all but *one fold under one ſhepherd.* But the right of judgment leaves to every individual his full liberty to follow the dictates of his conſcience. On this principle none are injured, and all enjoy *the liberty with which Chriſt hath made his people free.* This liberty ſooner or later will be enjoyed; and then every man will *ſit under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid.*

Were *this* the only evil prevented by admitting the right of private judgment, it would juſtify the warmeſt zeal in promoting the ſpread of this juſt and amiable principle. But the evils ariſing

from the denial of this right are many and dreadful. The doctrine of impoſition is the Eccleſiaſtical Pandora's box, from which all the evils which have afflicted the church, in darker ages, have proceeded. For perſecution as naturally flows from it as the ſtream from the fountain, or as light from the ſun. Admit the right to impoſe, and you admit the power to enforce. For what avails the right, if the power to exerciſe it be denied? Our fathers felt its unhappy effects, and both the hiſtory of the Puritans of the laſt century, and that of the Biſhops and others in Queen Mary's days, are dreadful proofs of its unhappy effects. We truſt the darkneſs in this reſpect is for ever paſt, and that the true light of equal religious liberty will continue to *ſhine brighter and brighter to the perfect day.*

In reading the accounts of the bloody perſecutions with which our hiſtory, and the hiſtory of the Chriſtian church is ſtained, we are ready to conceive that Mary, and thoſe who have acted the ſame tyrannical part, were naturally cruel and ferocious. But I apprehend this is a general miſtake. Their conduct was not the effect ſo much of inhumanity, as of their falſe principles that they alone were right——that they had a right to impoſe, and a power to puniſh reſiſtance. There wanted nothing but a great deal of falſe religious zeal to get the better of the juſt feelings of humanity, and to make them think they did God

God ſervice by impriſoning, harraſſing, and deſtroying all who had the courage to avow their different religious ſentiments, and the fortitude to meet the dangers with which they were ſurrounded. Of all falſe principles, which pretend to have Chriſtianity for their author, and the honor of God for their end, the denial of the right of private judgment is the moſt unfounded and deſtructive.

It is painful to purſue this principle of impoſition through all its various and horrid conſequences. But what miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, when he has got ſight of a principle ſo inimical to religion and the human race, would not wiſh to have the honor, though in ever ſo ſmall a degree, of accelerating its deſtruction. The name of this worſt of devils, undoubtedly, is LEGION. No good can it produce. Nothing but prevarication, hypocriſy, apoſtacy, miſery and death, are its natural offſpring. I conclude this article with earneſtly praying, that God may ſoon deſtroy this tyrant by *the ſpirit of his mouth, and the brightneſs of his coming*

On a review of theſe four principal reaſons of Proteſtant Diſſent, it will be found that they every one lead to peace and happineſs. They bring *glory to God*, by producing *peace on earth* and *good will to men.*

To

To conclude, obſerve;

1ſt. That except theſe principles be admitted, Chriſtianity ought not to have been taught in the world. For if civil governors have got dominion over the conſciences of men, neither Chriſt, nor his Apoſtles, nor any of the worthies of old, were to be juſtified in their diſſent from the religion of the different countries in which they were born or reſided. If theſe principles be unjuſt, we ought to renounce our prejudices in favour of Daniel, the Three Children, Jeſus Chriſt, and his Apoſtles; and we ought likewiſe to retract all the hard things we have ſaid againſt Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the chief prieſts and rulers of the Jews.

If theſe principles be denied, Jeſus Chriſt was a ſeditious perſon; the charge brought againſt him was juſt, *He ſtirreth up the people;* the reaſon which his enemies gave to Pilate was a good one, *If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæſar's friend.* Then Nebuchadnezzar was a vigilant magiſtrate, who, by an act of well-timed ſeverity, cruſhed rebellion in its bud. What a pity, if theſe principles be falſe, that Providence ſhould interpoſe, by ſtopping the mouths of the Lions, and by preventing the natural action of the fire, through the interpoſition of one, whom the diſturbed imagination of the prince thought *was like the ſon of God!*

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If theſe principles be falſe, Daniel and the Three Children were rebels and innovators at Babylon; Jeſus Chriſt was an innovator in Judea, and Paul an innovator at Athens and Rome; and their ſufferings were the reward of their deeds. But who is not ſhocked at the firſt appearance of ſuch ideas? If the conſequences be ſhocking, what muſt the principle be from which they naturally flow? This dreadful principle is the denial of the right of private judgment.

2d. Obſerve that, if theſe principles be unjuſt, what is called the reformation from popery ſtands condemned. For on what other principles, but the principles of Proteſtant Diſſent, can that remarkable and glorious event be juſtified? The reformers denied all authority but that of Jeſus Chriſt. They thought that the Scriptures, and not the decrees of councils, were the rule of faith; and on this account they exclaimed, in anſwer to the Catholics, who aſked, Where was your religion before Luther? The Bible, The Bible is the religion of Proteſtants. They aſſerted the right of private judgment. Happy would it have been for poſterity, if all proteſtants had followed their example, and had not denied to others what they claimed for themſelves. On this ground ſtands every proteſtant church in the world. On this the different eſtabliſhments of the proteſtant churches in this kingdom ſtand. For, as Lord Mansfield well obſerved in the Houſe of Lords, the

the proteſtant diſſenting churches, as well as the epiſcopal church, are not only tolerated, but eſtabliſhed; and indeed there is only this difference, the latter is an endowed church, and the former are not. Once more,

3d. Deny theſe principles, and no reform in religion can take place. The example of the Apoſtle, in reſpect to the Corinthians, will then be uſeleſs. I allude to that part of his letter reſpecting the abuſes in the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24, 25. He there went back to the original inſtitution, and left us an example of reform. Keep the ſource of information, the Holy Scriptures, open; admit and encourage the right of private judgment, and we may then be *going on to perfection*, and may approach nearer and nearer to that degree of it, to which the church will have arrived, when there will be *no need for a man to ſay to his neighbour, know the Lord; but all ſhall know him from the leaſt to the greateſt.* May the happy period ſoon arrive! may Chriſt alone reign from ſea to ſea! then to him alone will be aſcribed the glory of dominion over conſcience; for *to him every knee ſhall bow, and every tongue ſhall confeſs.* Amen!

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